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ANNOUNCER'S OPENING AND CLOSING
PART FOR TIMELY FARM TOPIC #37b

OPENING

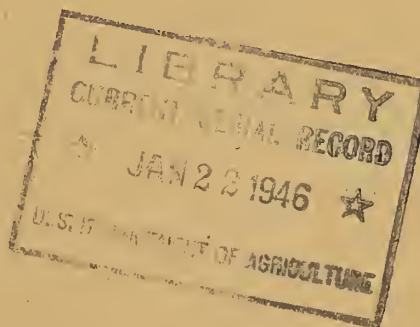
ANNOUNCER (LIVE): Even in these wartime days, when there's so much emphasis on growing our own home food supply, many of us are inclined to take fresh vegetables for granted. But give us a few months in a spot where there just aren't any vegetables....and my guess is we'd be dreaming about red tomatoes and fresh green lettuce.

Today, we're going to hear by transcription how the Army Air Forces has used one of the miracles of science to make gardens grow, where nothing grew before. Keith Himebaugh (Highm-baw), Director of Information for the U. S. Department of Agriculture leads off. Mr. Himebaugh.

CLOSING

ANNOUNCER (LIVE): And this is _____ at Radio Station _____.
Thanks Lieutenant Hutto (Hut-oh) and to Colonel Torrey, Corporal Burton, Mr. Blodgett and Mr. Himebaugh for bringing us this story of chemical vegetable gardening on Ascension Island.

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VEGETABLES GROWN WITHOUT SOIL

A transcription by Keith Himebaugh, Director of Information, U. S. Department of Agriculture; Lt. Max Hutto, AAF Combat Reporter; Kendrick W. Blodgett, Field Director AAF Hydroponics Project; Lt. Colonel John D. Torrey, Jr., Commanding Officer, USAF, Ascension Island; and Corporal Wayne Burton, Senath, Missouri. Recorded June 20, 1945. Time 6 minutes and 27 seconds.

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TRANSCRIPTION:

HIMEBAUGH: In a minute you're going to hear a first-hand, ring-side account of how the Army Air Forces are providing garden fresh vegetables to their personnel stationed on a barren, rocky island in Mid-Atlantic.

It was my good fortune to be on that Island during a brief experience as a War Correspondent on the day the first vegetables were harvested from this garden...a garden without soil. The plants are grown in a liquid chemical solution.

Now, I'd like to make this point about chemical gardens.....There's no evidence that they will be a substitute for soil in this country. But where shipping distances and growing conditions make the usual supply methods impractical, the Air Forces can use them to supply fresh foods needed for health.

And it seems to me that if they'll go to all that trouble to supply fresh vegetables, we here at home where we have the soil can go to a little extra trouble to see that our Victory Gardens grow and flourish in abundance. So this is my tip to you....Keep your garden growing, and don't forget there's still time to plant late garden crops.

While I was on "the rock", as they call it, I watched a combat correspondent of the Fighting AAF record the impressions of the growers and consumers of these vegetables raised without soil. Now, you can hear it just the way I did. Come in, Lieutenant.

HUTTO: This is your AAF Combat Reporter, Lt. Max Hutto, speaking to you from Ascension Island. If you're not as well up on your geography as you might be, let me say that Ascension Island is in the middle of the South Atlantic -- about half-way between Brazil and Africa. On this lonely, windswept thirty-five square miles of volcanic lava are stationed many American GI's. Ascension is a stop on the South Atlantic route of the Army Air Transport Command, as well as being the base for other units -- aviation engineers, coast artillery, infantry -- in other words, a composite force.

Today a very significant and historic event is taking place. It's harvest time -- harvest time for a crop of fresh vegetables which have been grown in this barren ground through a process developed by the Army Air Forces. This hydroponics project, as it is called, is the largest in the world, and marks the first time military forces have stepped into the field.

We have set up our wire recorder beside the beds where these vegetables are growing, and we have here the man who is best qualified to tell about them. He is Mr. Kendrick W. Blodgett of Terre Haute, Indiana, Field Director of the Army Air Forces Hydroponics Project. Mr. Blodgett, how much space have you here devoted to the project.

BLODGETT: We have about 80,000 square feet, which is a little more than an acre and a half.

HUTTO: That's quite a bit of ground. And what vegetables are you growing here, Mr. Blodgett?

BLODGETT: We're growing tomatoes, radishes, cucumbers, lettuce, and peppers.

HUTTO: All vegetables usually associated with rich soil. It's astonishing to see these lush vines growing out of what looks like the ashes shoveled out of the furnace. Would you tell us a bit about how you accomplish this?

BLODGETT: Certainly. Hydroponics is the science of growing things in water which has been chemically enriched. We add to the water those substances which the lava cinder lacks -- nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, calcium, and magnesium in this case.

HUTTO: I see. And exactly how does it work?

BLODGETT: Well, the beds are asphalt troughs about three feet wide. We fill the trough with volcanic ash and plant our seeds in it. Then, periodically, we run the treated water through the trough, reclaiming it for further use as it runs out.

HUTTO: Now, this island doesn't look like one with a plentiful supply of water. Where do you get the water you use in this work?

BLODGETT: We use distilled sea water.

HUTTO: You actually distil sea water to supply all these vegetables?

BLODGETT: Yes, we have our own distillation plant on the island. It was built by aviation engineers, and it furnishes all the water used on the island, hydroponics project and all.

HUTTO: Mr. Blodgett, when was this project actually started?

BLODGETT: We started about the middle of January with the construction.

HUTTO: Has it all been smooth sailing?

BLODGETT: No, indeed, far from it! It's been a battle from the start. The insects seemed to be very grateful for the fresh food, too. We had trouble with leaf rollers, tomato worms, and even crickets. Once, when we set traps, suspecting mice of causing damage, we discovered the crickets even eating the cheese off the traps.

HUTTO: They like a balanced diet, no doubt. One more question. How did the Air Forces happen to put this hydroponics project here?

BLODGETT: Well, Ascension Island was a natural for it. No fresh food could be grown here naturally because of the volcanic rock and lack of rainfall and there weren't enough refrigerator ships to keep it supplied from the States. And take it from me, because I know -- it means a lot to the men here to be able to eat fresh green food.

HUTTO: Thank you, Mr. Blodgett. We'll find out about your last remark right now, because we have one of the men here to speak for himself. He's Corporal Wayne Burton of Senath, Missouri. Corporal, have you been following this project?

BURTON: I sure have. Everybody on the Rock knows about it.

HUTTO: I expect they do. Tell me, are you in favor of it?

BURTON: Boy, if it means I can sink my teeth into a fresh tomato, I'm all for it!

HUTTO: Than you, Corporal Burton. I'd call that real enthusiasm. Standing beside me is Lieutenant Colonel John D. Torrey, Jr., Commanding Officer United States Armed Forces on Ascension Island. Colonel Torrey, how do you feel about this hydroponics project?

TORREY: This hydroponics project is concrete evidence that the Army is taking care of its men. To us on Ascension Island, this initial harvest has a practical meaning -- it means fresh vegetables on the table. It has not been physically practicable to supply this isolated spot with perishable garden vegetables by other means. We have been getting good food--the best possible under the circumstances--with all of the necessary vitamins. But nothing can take the place of fresh vegetables. We who have been without them for so long can testify to that. All of us here--officers and men alike--appreciate from the bottom of our stomachs, this additional proof that the Army is looking after its own.

HUTTO: Thank you, Lt. Col. John D. Torrey. Yes, the Army Air Forces trains fliers, but they do many other things, too, of which this is a sample. This is just the beginning -- soon there will be other similar projects scattered throughout the war's frontiers. Then, perhaps, our GI's can mix their K rations with Chef's Salad. This is your AAF Combat Reporter returning you to the United States.

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by
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author